



## THE ROYAL CANADIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

# M A S S E Y M E D A L

PRESENTED TO

*William C. Wonders*

For outstanding personal achievement in advancing the development of geography as an academic discipline in Canada and in pioneering geographical research and publication on arctic and sub-arctic regions.

## CITATION

*W*ILLIAM WONDERS is the quintessential professional geographer. He has devoted half a century to teaching, researching, writing and publishing in a multitude of geographical sub-fields, from climate to settlement and from vegetation to toponymy. His primary research focus has been the geography of the Canadian North but he has also extensively studied and written about the geography of Europe's North. His output has been prolific. There have been several books; seminal papers, which have appeared as chapters in major geographical treatises; hundreds of journal articles; important contributions to textbooks; and two co-authored atlases of Alberta. These works have played a significant role in documenting the geography of Canada. Dr. Wonders has acquired a well-earned reputation as an authority on all geographical aspects of the North. He has been lauded by his professional peers and his students at home and abroad and has been welcomed as a visiting scholar and lecturer in universities across Canada, in the United States and in Europe. Dr. Wonders received an honorary doctorate from Sweden's Uppsala University for his contribution to northern studies and was appointed to the Royal Society of Canada. He is also an institution builder, having established the first university geography department in the Province of Alberta.

William Clare Wonders was born in 1924, in Toronto. His interest in geography came early, having been stimulated at Toronto's Riverdale Collegiate in one of the first geography classes offered at a Canadian grade school. His fascination with the subject confirmed, he quickly went on to university studies. He earned his Bachelors degree in honours geography at the University of Toronto in 1946; his Masters and Ph.D. degrees followed in short order. His doctoral dissertation, which was on the climate of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, was defended in 1951. All three degrees were completed within a period of five years and he was accorded first class honours in each.

In 1953, Dr. Wonders joined the department of political economy at the University of Alberta. This was the first appointment of a geographer to a university faculty in that province. Four years later, at age 33, he was appointed professor and head of the University's newly established department of geography. Under Dr. Wonders' leadership, the department expanded rapidly. Within ten years, there were 1,500 students enrolled in geography courses and 65 graduate students at either the masters or doctoral levels. Subsequently, the department became one of the largest in Canada. Dr. Wonders also created the Boreal Institute to foster research on the vast Boreal Forest Region and served as the Institute's first director.

Bill Wonders' fascination with geography stemmed in part from a love of maps and he has a penchant for collecting them. In the 1950s, he started a map collection at the University and that collection has become the largest of its kind in Canada. In North America, it is exceeded only by the map collection of the University of Santa Barbara in California. The University of Alberta named this treasure, the William C. Wonders Map Collection, as a tribute to its founder.

William Wonders' role in the development of university geography was significant at the national and international levels, as well as the provincial. He served as president and councillor of the Canadian Association of Geographers. Over the course of his career, numerous academic and professional committees, boards and panels from local to international levels benefited from his participation. In the process, he became a most effective and influential advisor and advocate for professional geography. Furthermore, he served on many technical and policy bodies. For example, for 12 years, he sat on the Alberta Historic Sites Board, which is responsible for the investigation and approval of geographical names in that province. With the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, he initially chaired the advisory committee on toponymy research and later became a full member of the Committee. In 1946, he joined The Royal Canadian Geographical Society and has been an active member for decades. He was a member of the Society's editorial advisory committee for over 20 years and was the inaugural lecturer for the Society's expanded lecture series in 1970.

His accomplishments in research, teaching and institution-building place William Wonders in that small group of distinguished scholars who established geography as a formal academic discipline and profession in Canada. He is truly one of the pillars of the discipline in our country.



Denis A. St-Onge, O.C.

President

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